

ORATION*

DELIVERED BY D. B. KURTZ,

**Before San Diego Lodge No. 35, F. & A. M.
On the 24th day of June 1869.**

BRETHREN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN: In standing before you this day, I have, in common with this intelligent audience and with my brothers of the mystic tie particularly, to lament the failure, on the part of the brethren, to call some abler hand to the performance of the task which devolves upon me.

Whoever attentively observes the objects which surround him, will find abundant reason to admire the works of Nature, and to adore the Being who direct such astonishing operations, he will be convinced, that Infinite Wisdom could alone design, and Infinite power finish, such amazing works.

Were a man placed in a beautiful garden, would not his mind be affected with exquisite delight on a calm survey of its rich collections? Would not the groves, the grottoes, the artful and flowery wilds, the opening vistas, the lofty cascades, the winding streams, the whole variegated scene, awaken his sensibility and inspire his soul with the most exalted ideas? When he observed the delicate order, the nice symmetry, and beautiful disposition of every part, seemingly complete in itself, yet reflecting new beauties on the other, and all contributing to make one perfect whole, would not his mind be agitated with the most bewitching sensations; and would not the view of the delightful scene naturally lead him to admire and venerate the happy genius who contrived it? If the productions of art so forcibly impress the mind with admiration, with how much greater astonishment and reverence must we behold the operations of Nature, which presents to view unbounded scenes of utility and delight, in which Divine Wisdom is most strikingly conspicuous? These scenes are indeed too

* Transcribed by Sean K.T. Shiraishi, M.A., Historian, Unity Lodge #632.

expanded for the narrow capacity of man to comprehend; yet whoever contemplates the general system, from the uniformity of the plan must naturally be directed to the original source, the Supreme Governor of the world, the one perfect and unsullied beauty! Besides all the pleasing prospects that everywhere surround us, and with which our senses are every moment gratified; beside the symmetry, good order, and proportion, which appear in all the works of creation, something farther attracts the reflecting mind, and draws its attention nearer to the divinity – the universal harmony and affection and the different species of beings of every rank and denomination. These are the cements of the rational world, and by these alone it subsists. When they cease, nature must be dissolved, and man, the image of his maker and the chief of his works, be overwhelmed in the general chaos

In the whole order of beings, from the seraph which adores and burns down to the meanest insect, all, according to their rank in the scale of existence, have, more or less, implanted in them, the principle of association with others of the same species, even the most inconsiderable animals are formed into different ranks and societies, for mutual benefit and protection. Need we name the careful ant, or the industrious bee; insects which the wisest of men have recommended as patterns of unwearied industry and prudent oversight? When we extend our ideas, we shall find, that the innate principle of friendship increases in proportion to the extension of our intellectual faculties; the only criterion by which a judgment can be formed respecting the superiority of one part of the animal creation above the other, is by observing the degrees of kindness and good nature in which it excels. Such are the general principles which pervade the whole system of creation; how forcibly then must such lessons predominate in our assemblies, where civilization and virtue are most zealously cherished, under the sanction of science and the arts.

No subject can more properly engage the attention, than the benevolent dispositions which indulgent nature has bestowed upon the rational species. These are replete with the happiest effects, and afford to the mind the most agreeable reflections. The breast which is inspired with tender feelings, is naturally prompted to a reciprocal intercourse of kind and generous actions. As human nature rises in the scale of beings, the social affections likewise arise. Where friendship is unknown, jealousy and suspicion prevail; but where that virtue is the cement, true happiness subsists. In every breast there is propensity to friendly acts, which exerted to effect, sweetens every temporal enjoyment; and although it does

not remove the disquietudes, it tends at least to allay the calamities of life.

Friendship is traced through the circle of private connexions to the grand system of Universal Benevolence, which no limits can circumscribe, as its influence extend to every branch of the human race. Actuated by this sentiment, each individual connects his happiness with the happiness of his neighbor, and a fixed and permanent union is established among men.

Nevertheless, though Friendship considered as the source of universal benevolence, be unlimited, it exerts its influence more of less powerfully, as the objects it favors are nearer or more remote. Hence the love of friends, and of country takes lead in our affections, and gives rise to that true patriotism, which fires the soul with the most generous flame, creates the best and most disinterested virtue, and inspires that public spirit and heroic ardour which enable us to support a good cause, and risk our lives in its defence. This commendable virtue crowns the lover of his country with unfading laurels, gives a luster to his actions and consecrated his name to latest ages. The tyrant warriors glory may consist in murder, and the rude savage of his desolating sword; but the blood of thousands will not stain the hands of his country's friend. His virtues are open, and of the noblest kind. Conscious integrity supports him against the arm of power, and should he bleed by tyrant hands, he gloriously dies a martyr in his cause and leaves to posterity an everlasting monument of the greatness of his soul. Though friendship appears divine when employed in preserving the liberties of our country, it shines with equal splendor in more tranquil scenes. Before it rises into the noble flame of patriotism, aiming destruction at the heads of tyrants, thundering for liberty, and counting danger in defence of rights; we behold it calm and moderate, burning with an even glow, improving the soft hours of peace, and heightening the relish for virtue. In those happy moments, contracts are formed, societies are instituted, and the vacant hours of life are employed in the cultivation of social and polished manners. On this general plan the universality of our system is established. Were friendship confined to the spot of our nativity, its operation would be partial, and imply a kind of enmity to other nations. Where the interests of one country interfere wit those of another, nature dictates an adherence to the welfare of our own immediate connections; but such interference apart, the true Mason is a citizen of the world, and his philanthropy extends to all the human race. Uninfluenced by local prejudices, he knows no preference in virtue but according to its degree, from whatever clime it may spring.

For centuries, it has been the custom of Free and Accepted Masons, to convene on the birthday of Saint John the Baptist, who is one of our Patron Saints, and supporter of our Order; let us for a moment contemplate the character of our Patron Saint. As it is presented to us, and so far as my information extends, all Christian denominations, Protestant and Catholic, concur in believing that John occupied elevated ground, and performed vastly important duties in the religious world. All, we believe, concur in pronouncing him an eminently good man: hence Christians venerate his name. These reasons, primarily, and his devotion to Masonry, secondarily, move us this day to unite with Christians in setting forth the merits of Saint John the Baptist. In the wilderness of Judea we behold a man of singular appearance: his clothing is of camel's hair, begirt with a leathern girdle; his meat is locusts and wild honey. He says to those around him, "repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." Excited by the novel appearance of the man, the novelty of his doctrines, and some, perhaps, by an honest desire to be instructed by him, vast multitudes assemble around him. With the fidelity of an honest servant, he sets forth the nature and design of his mission, and produces his credentials by which he expects to gain the benefits of a fair and impartial hearing. He claims not to be a teacher come upon his own authority, but says: This is he that was spoken of by the Prophet saying, "the voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths strait." From a computation of prophetic numbers the expounders of the law of Moses and the writings of the Prophets, were expecting the agent of Messiah.

And as the people were in expectation all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not; John answered and said unto them all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose, he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire!" These allusions to the life of our Patron Saint, present him to us as the turning point between the law of works and the reign of Grace; as the unassuming forerunner of the Messiah – the inculcator of universal benevolence – the teacher of sound and practical duties, and a martyr in the unvarying path of duty. While living, his influence was extensively felt throughout all Judea; and even now, though dead, he still speaketh. In the life and spirit of Saint John, we see much of the genius and spirit of Freemasonry. Masonry, in its present form, was established at the building of the temple by King Solomon the Wise; men of different countries were brought together, and Solomon knew that some system must be adopted in order to procure harmony among the laborers; here his

wisdom is apparent. He devised a scheme, which, while it required all the laborers to believe in the existence of one sovereign ruler, still allowed them to worship God under their own vine and fig tree, according to the dictates of their own consciences, and to call their God by whatever name they thought proper, whether that name be the Great Spirit, Jehovah, Jove, or Lord.

In this system is embodied a set of rules which inculcate pure morality, benevolence, truth, strict honesty, impartial justice, and in fine, all those principles and duties which are essential to the existence of a moral and social being. He thus established a system which may be received by the good and the pure in every clime, in every age, of every sect, denomination or party; it is a great moral institution based upon this holy book, and inculcating brotherly love, relief and truth – cherishing an ardent attachment to, and cultivating an intimate acquaintance with the liberal arts and sciences; and serving as a band of union between man and his fellow-man. We are also taught to have faith in God, hope in immortality, and extend charity to all mankind, yet she does not assume to prescribe the mode of faith, in which all shall agree, but regarding each as responsible to the Deity, for his religious tenets and remembering that all have not been reared under the same religious tuition – dispersed abroad as they are in the various quarters of the globe – she insists only on those fundamental points in which all agree and without which, man is unworthy of the confidence of his fellow-man. Let us remember my brethren, that Freemasonry grows with the growth, and strengthens with the progress of the times in which it flourishes. It travels with the improvement of society, binding men together in the bonds of truth and charity. It has made the Indian, the Peruvian, the Arab, the Turk, better than either would have been without it; for it embraces men of every sect, country and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those, who might otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance.

A son of the Hebrew may tell us that the Messiah has not yet come; an Arab of the desert may exclaim with a loud voice “Allah il Allah,” there is no God but God, and Mahomet is his Prophet, and the poor red Indian of the West, may point to the blue heavens and show us, where the Great Spirit dwells and looks down upon his lakes and blesses his wigwam and bow; and yet, each of these may have a heart to feel for, and a hand to relieve a brother in distress, no matter from what sea or land he may come. This is Freemasonry. It reaches where no other human agency or moral influence could find its way.

In the Holy Land we find our ancestral home, here every hill and vale seem familiar. In the distant perspective, we behold a mountain; in that mountain, a magnificent temple, we trace its ground floor, its middle chamber, its sanctum sanctorum, its cap stone; we see Sidonious hewing cedar on the heights of Lebannon, and boats moving on the sea to Jappa; we watch the stone squarers with gauge and gavel, in the quarries of Zeredathah; and we look beyond the mountains and there lie the clay grounds of Jordan. Thus as we ascend the Masonic ladder the panorama widens on the view, fresh as the memory of life and enchanting as the landscape, at which we gazed in our childhood from our father's house on the hill top. Some may object to our institution because we have profane swearers, and a variety of unenviable characters in our lodges, the charge is true, but aimed amiss; do you not suppose that every good Mason within and without these walls, heartily laments the fact? But, to him who urges this objection, I appeal as to a candid opponent; which shall be condemned, Masonry, or the man who, by profanity, tramples upon the principles, and insults the genius and spirit of the Order? I am willing to let our generous opponents decide. A disorderly, profane, and wicked Mason meets not one approving smile from the genius and spirit of Masonry; but, if you choose to urge this objection against the institution, take care that it do not prove too much for you. The army of the United States has produced an Arnold, the church of our Savior an Owen – who though once a preacher of the everlasting gospel, subsequently became the proud condemner of all religions and the daring champion of infidelity. Even in heaven itself, we read that there was war; Michael and his angels fought, so if the church of God and heaven, have not escaped the polluting touch of the ungodly, how is it possible that we can escape.

Another objection is urged, that we exclude the ladies, from our sanctuaries and our services. They are the column of beauty in the sanctum of our homes, but still the tyler tyles them out, and since the year of light but one lady has ever been a member of the Order; do not believe us, however, wanting in respect for the sex, nor think us tardy in yielding to her promptly the palm of social superiority. The Mason will yield to none in high chivalric regard for the ladies. When Masonry was in its infancy, it was operative, then no Mason would allow his wife or his daughter to go out with a pick to the quarry or to work upon an edifice with the gavel and level, the trowel and square. Woman was designed for labors higher, purer, holier. Afterwards the art became speculative, and these implements became symbols. As her fair hands were not intended for such labor, so her gentle heart needed not the rough striking gavel to divest it of vices, nor a password to call forth the

spontaneous charities of her confiding nature; but, ladies, were it otherwise, and could you be admitted late our Order, I can assure you, no brother present, would be more willing than myself, to prepare and conduct you through our ceremonies; but your admission would be an innovation. And I think 'twas wisely ordained by our Order of old, to tile fast the door spite entreaties or sighs, for once in our lodge she would rule uncontrolled, and govern the craft by the light of her eyes.

Brethren, I feel happy this day in meeting and in greeting you, you have connected yourself to myriads whom in this life you will never see. While we are meeting here our brethren in others parts of the world are doubtless assembled, having in view the same thing that we have. Asia, Europe, and America, have their lodges and their members, halls dedicated to Freemasonry, to virtue, and to universal benevolence are found in the populous cities, scattered through the refined nations of Europe; they bedeck the banks of the Ganges, send forth a moralizing upon the sons that live upon the beautiful vales and romantic heights of America, and from east to west, from farthest north to farthest south, they stand as moral, directive and instructive fingerboards, pointing out the path of duty, of benevolence, of justice and of virtue. These halls have been erected by the members of an institution, whose brow is adorned by the hoary and venerable locks of antiquity; whose courts have been attended by the wisest and best of men in every age; whose foundation and fortification, in all time, have been the moral law of God, and whose principles are destined to live as long as the wheels of time shall roll.

In conclusion I would say, brethren treasure up the principles, practice the duties, and exhibit the fruits of Masonry, by a life of unflinching fidelity and honesty, disarm blind prejudice of every sting. Square your lives by the square of virtue; remember you are moving on the current of time to that country "from whose bourne no traveler returns;" remember Jacobs ladder, whose principal rounds are Faith, Hope, and Charity. These properly directed, together with a due observance of the requirements of the Great Ruler of heaven and earth, will qualify you for a happy life, a peaceful death, a triumphant admission through the gate into the city, and, finally, for occupying a place, as living stones, in that spiritual building, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where our most worshipped Grand Master of the Universe presides.